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What differences do welfare state variations make for women? How do women and men fare in different welfare states? In the first truly comparative book on this topic, Diane Sainsbury answers these questions by analyzing the situation in countries whose welfare state policies differ in significant ways: the United States, Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Building on feminist criticisms of mainstream research, Professor Sainsbury reconceptualizes the crucial dimensions of welfare state variation and identifies those relevant to gender. She uses this framework to determine the extent to which legislation reflects and perpetuates the gendered division of labor in the family and society, as well as what types of policy alter gender relations in social provision. The application of the framework calls attention to the importance of distinguishing between women's entitlements as wives and as mothers, in contrast to previous analysis which has generally conflated women's social rights based on wifely and motherly labor. It also underlines the need to examine the social rights of both women and men in order to move toward greater equality.

Diane Sainsbury tracks policy changes from the late 1960s to the present day and evaluates the impact of gender equality reforms to show which reforms work and which do not. She increases our understanding of how policy mechanisms, especially the bases of entitlement, exclude or incorporate women, and offers constructive proposals for securing greater equality of the sexes.

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To Robert Brewster

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